

National Aeronautics and  
Space Administration

**Headquarters**  
Washington, DC 20546-0001



Reply to Attn of: YF

February 11, 1998

Dear Colleague:

Plans for the second Announcement of Opportunity (AO) for the Earth System Science Pathfinder (ESSP) are being formulated within the Office of Earth Science at NASA Headquarters. Based upon the successful completion of the first AO evaluation and selection process, and validation by the Earth Science community at our "Lessons Learned" conference, the second ESSP AO will be adjusted slightly to incorporate some of the suggestions for improvement. The second AO is currently scheduled for release on April 13, 1998. Highlights of these changes are summarized here.

One of the changes to the AO-2 process will be the timing of the selection process itself. Programmatic milestones include a Pre-proposal Conference on Tuesday, April 28, 1998; Step 1 Proposals due in May 1998; Step 2 Proposals due in September 1998; and selections to be made in December 1998. With this schedule, conflicts with holidays, academic commitments and fiscal year constraints are expected to be minimized.

Once again, the ESSP AO will solicit proposals for at least two primary missions and one alternate mission. Mission cost caps for the primary missions are expected not to exceed \$90M and \$120M. These cost caps reflect a moderate increase from the first AO, and will once again include the cost of the launch vehicle. It should be noted that no significant change in launch service policy is expected in AO-2. We wish to emphasize that the caps are not to exceed limits and are not "propose to" values. Therefore, we are greatly interested in proposals with costs well below the maximum allowable that maintain correspondingly high science value so that we can have the possibility of selecting more than two primary missions.

The initial ESSP Announcement of Opportunity emphasized scientific investigations within the five areas of NASA Earth Science Enterprise priorities provided that complementary with NASA's existing and/or approved flight program could be clearly demonstrated. The second ESSP AO maintains this policy relative to complementary with existing / approved flight programs which include recently selected ESSP missions and NASA initiatives to purchase data from the private sector in support of its Earth science objectives. Given these existing / approved missions, NASA will focus the AO on the most urgent scientific themes within its five areas of scientific priority that are not addressed by these missions. The solicitation will primarily encourage proposals which address the area of focus, however, other proposals which offer highly innovative missions beyond the areas of focus will be considered by NASA. The justification of such innovations and their unique contribution(s) will be the responsibility of the PI and proposing team.

Step 1 proposals will be expanded to 15 pages to accommodate additional requested information concerning the physics of the proposed measurements and the technical maturity of the instrumentation required to make these measurements. Although Step 1 proposal evaluations will be based primarily on scientific merit, the feasibility of obtaining the necessary measurements with the proposed instrument technology to perform the proposed science investigation will be examined in detail.

The period of time to prepare Step 2 proposals will be expanded to 10 weeks. This increase in preparation time will help proposing teams to solidify and improve their proposals, without impacting the timing and efficiency of the evaluation and selection process. Technical maturity will be emphasized via a required self-assessment which is based on a standard rating scale as defined in the AO.

Additional changes to the AO process include requesting proposers to submit a "Letter of Intent" prior to Step 1 Proposal submission, in order to assist NASA in gauging the necessary evaluation effort and selection of the appropriate peer review panel. This Office also intends to host a Pre-proposal conference prior to Step 1 proposal submission, so that questions may be answered prior to the preparation and submission of any proposals.

The following changes to the Step 1 and Step 2 proposal requirements are intended to ease burdens on proposers and assist the evaluation team in performing a more efficient and complete examination of ESSP proposals.

The first change is a relaxation of the requirement for institutional signatures for Co-Investigators proposed in Step 1.

The second change involves those Step 2 proposals with significant international participation. These proposals will require a formal / official letter from the sponsor of the international component that indicates their commitment to support the proposed activity if selected. As with the first AO, NASA can assist in negotiating terms of an international MOU. However, it will remain the responsibility of the selected PI to secure final agreement and approval.

The third change is a requirement for Step 2 proposers to identify cost models used and assumptions made in generating mission cost estimates. Finally, with one AO cycle complete, a number of sample documents from the first two missions such as contracts, Mission Definition and Requirements Agreements, Statements of Work, Task Plans, MOUs, etc. will be made available for access by all proposers.

These minor programmatic and evaluation process changes are being made in an effort to improve an already successful ESSP Program. We fully expect the AO-2 process to result in the evaluation and selection of the second outstanding group of ESSP missions. I look forward to your participation in the next ESSP Announcement of Opportunity and thank you for your interest in the program. You can stay informed of ESSP activities and access the upcoming Announcement of Opportunity by visiting the ESSP homepage at <http://essp.gsfc.nasa.gov/>. Please contact Kevin Niewoehner at (202) 358-0751 or by e-mail at [kevin.niewoehner@hq.nasa.gov](mailto:kevin.niewoehner@hq.nasa.gov) if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

*"Original Signed by"*

Ghassem R. Asrar  
Associate Administrator for Earth Science